

# *Launch of Teaching Tools to Combat Anti-Semitism for Polish Secondary Schools*

Remarks by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič

Director of the  
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights



Warsaw, 5 March 2009

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Deputy Minister,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in the official launch of teaching materials to combat anti-Semitism to be used by students across Poland.

Out of 56 participating States of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – the OSCE – Poland is the fifth country to develop materials of this kind. We are grateful for the opportunity to co-operate with the Polish government and experts in this important endeavour.

Over the last years, hate crimes and violent acts of anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia have been on the rise in many parts of the OSCE region.

In response to this development, OSCE participating States have undertaken commitments to combat acts of this type. These commitments include efforts to collect better data on hate crimes, to strengthen police responses to such crimes, and to develop educational programmes to tackle bias and prejudice at an early age.

As the OSCE's specialized institution responsible for human rights, my office, ODIHR, is mandated with assisting participating States in these efforts. We have developed a number of tools and assistance programmes to support states in combating hate crimes.

Within the OSCE, education, including education on anti-Semitism and on the Holocaust, is recognized as one of the most important and effective means for preventing and responding to various forms of intolerance and discrimination, as well as for promoting integration and respecting diversity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The level of anti-Semitism in a country is an important barometer of the general level of tolerance and openness towards diversity in society. When anti-Semitism is on the rise, other ethnic or religious groups may also face acts of hatred and intolerance.

It is worrying that many of the different forms of anti-Semitism historically encountered in Europe can still be seen today. Anti-Semitism can manifest itself in anti-religious or racist forms. It can appear as ‘world conspiracy’ theory, as blood libel, as Holocaust denial or as the repetition of centuries-old prejudices.

Recent developments – the worsening global economic crisis, the war in the Gaza Strip – have shown, again, that when things go wrong, anti-Semitic prejudices rise.

It is encouraging that in Poland no violent anti-Semitic incidents have been officially reported this year. But a recent survey found that the percentage of people in Poland with unfavourable opinions about Jews rose from 27 percent in 2004 to 36 percent today.

It is our hope that the students who will work with the teaching materials will learn that some information they may have heard

about Jews might not represent facts, but anti-Semitic prejudice, often ages old.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The teaching materials to combat anti-Semitism do not deal with the history of Jews, but with the history of anti-Semitism. They do not explain the roots of anti-Semitism by portraying Jews, but by portraying non-Jews. They also try to explain that anti-Semitism is not a problem of Jews – although it is a problem for Jews.

Overall, the teaching materials we are presenting today consist of three parts.

- **First**, they teach us about the history of anti-Semitism all over Europe, including the Holocaust.
- **Second**, they address current issues related to contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism.
- **Finally**, they teach us a lesson about prejudices and discrimination in general: They stress that no form of discrimination and hatred can be tolerated in a democratic society based on the values of human rights.

Let me stress the international aspect of this project. As I mentioned earlier, teaching materials, similar to those we are launching today, have also been launched or are being developed in nine other countries in the OSCE region, including Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine.

Recently, ODIHR received a request from Austria and Sweden to work with governmental institutions on the development of customized country versions of the teaching tools for these two countries.

In each country where the materials are produced, the content is adapted according to the history and the current situation in that country, and is based on the curricula and the needs of teachers and students. The customized country versions are put together by national experts, based on an intensive consultative process of research and drafting

At this point, I want to thank the experts from the Polish-German Centre in Cracow, the Pedagogical University of Cracow and the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim for all the efforts that they put into this project over the last couple of years. I also want to mention the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, whose knowledge and expertise was a vital factor in the implementation of this project.

Let me also use this opportunity to mention a few other ODIHR activities in the area of hate crimes.

- We offer training programmes for police and prosecutors. The ODIHR's Law Enforcement Officers Programme (LEOP) is currently implemented here in Poland.
- In March 2009, a guidebook on hate crime legislation will be presented to the public. The guide is designed to be used as a reference tool by legislators, policymakers, law enforcement officials and civil society. It seeks, in non-technical language,

to place hate crime laws within a context, and highlight key issues that hate crime laws must address.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to thank all of you for coming here and for your interest in the teaching tools to combat anti-Semitism for Polish secondary schools.

I wish to thank the Polish Ministry of Education and Science and the National In-Service Teacher Training Center for the excellent co-operation. We look forward to further opportunities to continue this collaboration.

Today, more than 20 experts and professional teacher trainers will start a four-day training course on the teaching materials. In the future, these experts will train teachers from all over the country on how to use these materials effectively in classrooms. These trainings are supported by the Polish Ministry of Education and Science and the National In-Service Teacher Training Center.

In closing, I would like to wish all of the teachers, trainers and pedagogues who are present here today and will work with these materials much success. You have a crucial role to play in using these materials and contributing to the promotion of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding in Poland.

Thank you.